

Ratthapāla Sutta = රථිපාල සූත්‍රය

The Reality of Life

When the Buddha was at Thullakotthita, he was preaching the Dhamma, his doctrines there. Ratthapāla, the only son of the leading clan also came to visit the Buddha and listened to his teachings very faithfully sitting in that assembly. Then the brahmins and householders of Thullakotthita, having been instructed, urged, roused, and encouraged by the Blessed One's talk on Dhamma, delighted and rejoiced in his words. Rising from their seats, bowing down to him, they left. Meanwhile, Ratthapāla was happy about Buddha's message, and he was so glad to practice it totally. He thought that it is not easy to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell living at home. Therefore, he decided to enter the community of monks and practice this valuable message as a monk.

At the end of the sermon, Ratthapāla arrived at the Buddha and said to him "As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it's not easy, living at home, to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. Lord, I want — having shaved off my hair & beard and putting on the ochre robe — to go forth from the household life into homelessness. May I receive the going-forth in the Blessed One's presence? May I receive admission?" Here the Buddha advised him to get permission before ordination. Hopefully Ratthapāla went to his parents to get permission.

When this was said, Ratthapāla's parents said to him, "Ratthapāla, dear, you are our only son, dear & appealing, raised in comfort, brought up in comfort. You know nothing of suffering. Eat, drink, & enjoy yourself. While eating, drinking, & looking after yourself, you may enjoy yourself by indulging in sensual pleasures & making merit. We don't give our permission for you to go forth from the household life into homelessness. Even with your death we would not want to be separated from you, so how could we — while you're alive — give our permission for you to go forth from the household life into homelessness?"

Although Ratthapāla asked three times for permission again and again, his parents didn't like to give him permission for ordination. Because of no permission to become a monk, Ratthapāla decided to lay down right there on the bare floor, [saying,] "Here will be my death or my going-forth." And he went without food for one day... two days... three days, four... five... six days. He went without food for seven days. However, finally, the parents of Ratthapāla gave him permission to ordain.

As for Ven. Ratthapāla — dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, and resolute — he in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for himself in the here and now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." And thus, Master Ratthapāla became another one of the arahants, the enlightened ones. With the spiritual success, Ven. Ratthapāla came back to the Buddha, and he informed his supreme goal to the Buddha. The Buddha was pleasant about his supreme goal of the holy life.

As an enlightened one, Bhante Ratthapāla arrived at king Koravya's garden. There he spent several days. One day king Koravya came to pay his respects to Master Ratthapāla. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he stood to one side.

As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Ratthapāla, "There are cases where, having suffered these four kinds of loss, men shave off their hair & beard, put on the ochre robe, and go forth from the home life into homelessness. Which four? Loss through aging, loss through illness, loss of wealth, & loss of relatives... But Master Ratthapāla has suffered none of these. What did he know or see or hear that Master Ratthapāla went forth from the home life into homelessness?"

"Great king Koravya, there are four Dhamma summaries stated by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy and rightly self-awakened. Having known and seen and heard them, I went forth from the home life into homelessness. Which four?"

1. **'The world (life) is unstable and swept away (to destruction). It does not endure': This is the first Dhamma summary stated by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened. Having known and seen & heard it, I went forth from the home life into homelessness (*Upaniyati loko addhuvo* = උපනීයති ලොකො අද්ධුවො).**
2. **'The world (life) has no shelter and no protector (savior)': This is the second Dhamma summary... (*Attāno loko anabhissaro* = අන්තානො ලොකො අනභිස්සරො)**
3. **'The world (life) is without ownership. The world has nothing of its own; it has to leave all and pass on, leaving everything behind': This is the third Dhamma summary... (*Assako loko sabbam pahāya gamaniyam* = අස්සකො ලොකො සබ්බං පහාය ගමනීයං)**
4. **'The world (life) is insufficient (incomplete), insatiable and the slave to craving': This is the fourth Dhamma summary... (*Uno loko atitto tanhādāso* = ඌනො ලොකො අනිත්තො තණ්හාදසො)**

Here explained are the four natures about our life that always happen. Nobody in the Sansaric circle can overcome these challenges. That is why we have to find a spiritual teacher and have to practice his doctrines to overcome suffering and the Sansaric circle as well.

"Great king, these are the four Dhamma summaries stated by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened. Having known & seen & heard them, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

"Ven. Ratthapāla, you say, 'the world is swept away. It does not endure.' Now how is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"The world is unstable and swept away. It does not endure"
(*Upaniyati loko addhuwo* = උපනීයති ලොකො අද්ධුවො)

"What do you think, great king: When you were twenty or twenty-five years old — an expert elephant rider, an expert horseman, an expert charioteer, an expert archer, an expert swordsman — were you strong in arm & strong in thigh, fit, & seasoned in warfare?"

"Yes, Master Ratthapāla, when I was twenty or twenty-five years old... I was strong in arm & strong in thigh, fit, & seasoned in warfare. It was as if I had supernormal power. I do not see anyone who was my equal in strength."

"And what do you think, great king: Are you even now as strong in arm & strong in thigh, as fit, & as seasoned in warfare?"

"Not at all, Master Ratthapāla. I'm now a feeble old man, aged, advanced in years, having come to the last stage of life, 80 years old. Sometimes, thinking, 'I will place my foot here,' I place it somewhere else."

"It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened, said: 'The world is swept away. It does not endure.' Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

"It's amazing, Master Ratthapāla. It's astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened: 'The world is swept away. It does not endure.' For the world really is swept away, Master Ratthapāla. It does not endure

"The world is without shelter, without protector"

(*Attano loko anabhissaro* = අන්තානො ලොකො අනභිස්සරො)

"Now, in this royal court there are elephant troops & cavalry & chariot troops & infantry that will serve to defend us from dangers. And yet you say, 'The world is without shelter, without protector.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"What do you think, great king: Do you have any recurring illness?"

"Yes, Master Ratthapāla, I have a recurring wind-illness. Sometimes my friends and advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen, stand around me saying, 'This time King Koravya will die. This time King Koravya will die.'"

"And what do you think, great king: Can you say to your friends and advisors, relatives and blood-kinsmen, 'My friends and advisors, relatives and blood-kinsmen are commanded: all of you who are present, share out this pain so that I may feel less pain'? Or do you have to feel that pain all alone?"

"Oh, no, Master Ratthapāla, I can't say to my friends and advisors, relatives and blood-kinsmen, 'All of you who are present, share out this pain so that I may feel less pain.' I have to feel that pain all alone."

"It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy and rightly self-awakened, said: 'The world is without shelter, without protector.' Having known and seen and heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

"It's amazing, Master Ratthapāla. It's astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy and rightly self-awakened: 'The world is without shelter, without protector.' For the world really is without shelter, Master Ratthapāla. It is without protector.

"The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind"
 (*Assako loko sabbam pahāya gamaniyam*= අස්සකො ලොකො සබ්බං පහාය ගමනීයං)

"Now, in this royal court there is a great deal of gold & silver stashed away underground & in attic vaults. And yet you say, 'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"What do you think, great king? As you now enjoy yourself endowed & replete with the pleasures of the five senses, can you say, 'Even in the afterlife I will enjoy myself in the same way, endowed & replete with the very same pleasures of the five senses'? Or will this wealth fall to others, while you pass on in accordance with your kamma?"

"Oh, no, Master Ratthapāla, I can't say, 'Even in the afterlife I will enjoy myself in the same way, endowed & replete with the very same pleasures of the five senses.' This wealth will fall to others, while I pass on in accordance with my kamma."

"It was in reference to this, great king that the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened, said: 'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.' Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

"It's amazing, Ven. Ratthapāla. It's astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened: 'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.' For the world really is without ownership, Master Ratthapāla. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind."

"Now, Master Ratthapāla, you say, 'the world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"What do you think, great king: Do you now rule over the prosperous country of Kuru?"

"That is so, Bhante Ratthapāla. I rule over the prosperous country of Kuru."

"The world is insufficient, insatiable, the slave to craving"
 (*Uno loko atitto tanhādāso*= ඌනො ලොකො අතිත්තො තණ්හාදසො)

"What do you think, great king: Suppose a trustworthy, reliable man of yours were to come to you from the east. On arrival he would say to you, 'May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the east. There I saw a great country, powerful & prosperous, populous & crowded with people. Plenty are the elephant troops there, plenty the cavalry troops, chariot troops, & infantry troops. Plenty is the ivory-work there, plenty the gold & silver, both worked & unworked. Plenty are the women for the taking. It is possible, with the forces you now have, to conquer it. Conquer it, great king!' What would you do?"

"Having conquered it, Master Ratthapāla, I would rule over it."

"Now what do you think, great king? Suppose a trustworthy, reliable man of yours were to come to you from the west... the north... the south... the other side of the ocean. On arrival he

would say to you, 'May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the other side of the ocean. There I saw a great country, powerful and prosperous, populous and crowded with people. Plenty are the elephant troops there, plenty the cavalry troops, chariot troops, & infantry troops. Plenty is the ivory-work there, plenty the gold & silver, both worked & unworked. Plenty are the women for the taking. It is possible, with the forces you now have, to conquer it. Conquer it, great king!' What would you do?"

"Having conquered it, Bhante Ratthapāla, I would rule over it, too."

"It was in reference to this, great king that the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened, said: 'the world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.' Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

"It's amazing, Rev. Ratthapāla. It's astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened: 'the world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.' For the world really is insufficient, Master Ratthapāla. It's insatiable, a slave to craving." That is what Ven. Ratthapāla said.

We have above attitudes and natures because of ignorance. To prevent these attitudes, natures, challenges and sufferings we have to understand what happens to our life and the world.

We usually experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. When objects such as forms, sounds, smell, taste reach senses, we experience about the world. The nature of this experience is arising at the moment and instantly ceases at once. **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to occurrence (in the future)** (අනුත්ථා සම්භූතං නුත්ථා න භවිස්සති). It means if we experience something now, it had not happened in the past in the same way like now. Also, present experience doesn't go to the future in the same way. If someone can understand this reality, he is ready to give up extremes about the past and the future. Also, he tries to live in the present moment seeing arising and ceasing wisely with full awareness.

In this situation to get rid of this ignorance, wise reflection guides us to live in the present moment seeing world reality as impermanence. Our real happiness depends on how capable we are to live in the present moment. Here, it doesn't sound that we forget our past or future. We may have a good memory of the past and the future, but we don't run to the past or future without mindfulness. We see the past and future with full awareness. Buddhism never says to forget the past or the future. When we think about the past or the future, we must have a real awareness that now I read my mind. Here we practice to see the past and the future with full awareness living in the present.

To make this experience permanent, according to Buddhism, we have to follow the three disciplines those are virtue, tranquility and wisdom. First, we should practice discipline in our behavior and speech. Then practice our mind with mindfulness. Here we have to be aware of our body and mind. When we practice our mind using this meditation technique again and again, we are able to keep our mind in a particular wholesome object for a long time. When we reflect on impermanence about everything with concentrated mind, gradually we overcome suffering with the understanding of the world reality as impermanent, dissatisfactory and egoless.

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